

The Commoner.

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LINCOLN'S PLEA FOR LABOR

The Toledo Blade, like other republican papers, smarts under the rebuke that Lincoln's words give to the policy now prevailing in the republican party of putting capital above labor. The Blade recently denounced as forgeries certain quotations attributed to Lincoln in regard to the dignity of labor. The Appeal to Reason has looked the matter up and traces the utterances to unimpeachable authority. Raymond's Life of Lincoln, which was published soon after his death, contains on pages 498 to 500 a response to a committee of laboring men from New York who called upon him on the 21st day of March, 1864. In this reply, which will be found at the conclusion of this editorial, Lincoln refers to his own message to congress of December, 1861, in which he declared that "labor is prior to, and independent of, capital." And he insists that labor, therefore, "is superior to capital and deserves much higher consideration." He takes advantage of the occasion, too, to point out that the putting of labor first does not justify a disregard of the rights of property or argue against the advantage of owning property. In other words, after stating the proper relation which should exist between labor and capital, he proceeds to the defense of both. At the present time the capitalist places great emphasis upon what he calls "property rights," but often ignores things that are more important, namely, human rights. Property exists for man, not man for property. The fact that this interview between Mr. Lincoln and the laboring men was published immediately afterward, and the further fact that the bulk of it is a quotation from his message to congress, establishes beyond cavil the genuineness of the quotations. The republican papers seek to make it appear that Lincoln's position is being misrepresented, but the fact is that the republican party today has departed so far from Lincoln's position that his words and his position on public questions confront them at every turn. The interview, quoted verbatim from pages 498, 499 and 500 of Raymond's Life of Lincoln, is as follows:

"Gentlemen of the Committee: The honorary membership in your association, as generously tendered, is gratefully accepted.

"You comprehend, as your address shows, that the existing rebellion means more and tends to do more than the perpetuation of African slavery—that it is, in fact, a war upon the rights of all working people. Partly to show that this view has not escaped my attention, and partly that I cannot better express myself, I read a passage from the message to congress in December, 1861:

"It continues to develop that the insurrec-

tion is largely, if not exclusively, a war upon the first principle of popular government, the rights of the people. Conclusive evidence of this is found in the most grave and maturely considered public documents, as well as in the general tone of the insurgents. In those documents we find the abridgement of the existing right of suffrage, and the denial to the people of all right to participate in the selection of public officers, except the legislative, boldly advocated, with labored argument to prove that large control of the people in government is the source of all political evil. Monarchy itself is sometimes hinted at as a possible refuge from the power of the people.

"In my present position I could scarcely be justified were I to omit raising a warning voice against this approach of returning despotism.

"It is not needed, nor fitting, that a general argument should be made in favor of popular institutions; but there is one point, with its connections, not so hackneyed as most others, to which I ask a brief attention. It is the effort to place capital on equal footing, if not above labor, in the structure of government. It is assumed that labor is available only in connection with capital; that nobody labors unless somebody else, owning capital, somehow by the use of it induces him to labor. This assumed, it is next considered whether it is best that capital shall hire laborers, and thus induce them to work by their own consent, or buy them, and drive them to it without their consent. Having proceeded so far, it is naturally concluded that all laborers are either hired laborers, or what we call slaves. And, further, it is assumed that whoever is once a hired laborer, is fixed in that condition of life. Now there is no such relation between capital and labor as assumed, nor is there any such thing as a free man being fixed for life in the condition of a hired laborer. Both these assumptions are false, and all inferences from them are groundless.

"Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration. Capital has its rights, which are as worthy of protection as any other rights. Nor is it denied that there is, and probably always will be, a relation between capital and labor, producing mutual benefits. The error is in assuming that the whole labor of a community exists within that relation. A few men own capital, and that few avoid labor themselves, and, with their capital, hire or buy another few to labor for them. A large majority belong to neither class—neither work for others, nor have others working for them. In most of the southern states, a majority of the whole people, of all colors, are neither slaves nor masters; while

in the northern, a large majority are neither hirers nor hired.

"Men with their families—wives, sons, and daughters—work for themselves, on their farms, in their homes, and in their shops, taking the whole product to themselves, and asking no favors of capital on the one hand, nor of hired laborers or slaves on the other. It is not forgotten that a considerable number of persons mingle their own labor with capital; that is, they labor with their own hands and also buy or hire others to labor for them, but this is only a mixed and not a distinct class. No principle stated is disturbed by the existence of that mixed class.

"Again, as has already been said, there is not, of necessity, any such thing as the free hired laborer being fixed to that condition for life. Many independent men everywhere in these states, a few years back in their lives, were hired laborers. The prudent penniless beginner in the world labors for wages a while, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors in his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This is the just and generous and prosperous system which opens the way to all—gives hope to all, and consequent energy and progress, and improvement of condition to all. No men living are more worthy to be trusted than those who toil up from poverty—none less inclined to touch or take aught which they have not honestly earned. Let them beware of surrendering a political power they already possess, and which, if surrendered, will surely be used to close the door of advancement against such as they, and to fix new disabilities and burdens upon them, till all of liberty shall be lost."

"The views thus expressed remain unchanged, nor have I much to add. None are so deeply interested to resist the present rebellion as the working people. Let them beware of prejudices, working division and hostility among themselves. The most notable feature of a disturbance in your city last summer was the hanging of some working people by other working people. It should never be. The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations, and tongues, and kindreds. Nor should this lead to a war upon property, or the owners of property. Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable; is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and, hence, is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

The Doctrine of Thrones.

The opponents of imperialism assert that "it is the doctrine of thrones that man is too ignorant to govern himself." Today the republican party is thoroughly committed to this doctrine of thrones.

In a speech delivered in the house of representatives in 1818, Henry Clay pleaded for South American independence from Spanish rule.

"It is the doctrine of thrones," said Mr. Clay, "that man is too ignorant to govern himself. Their partisans assert his incapacity in reference to all nations; if they cannot command universal assent to the proposition it is then demanded as to particular nations; and our pride and our presumption too often make converts of us. I contend that it is to arraign the disposition of Providence himself to suppose that He created beings incapable of governing themselves and to be trampled on by kings. Self-government is the natural government of man, and for proof I refer to the aborigines of our own land. Were I to speculate in hypothesis unfavorable to human liberty, my speculations should be founded rather upon the

vice, refinement or density of population. Crowded together in compact masses, even if they were philosophers, the contagion of the passions is communicated and caught, and the effect too often, I admit, is the overthrow of liberty. Dispersed over such an immense space as that on which the people of Spanish-America are spread, their physical, and I believe their moral condition, both favor their liberty."

The Utah electoral vote may be needed by the G. O. P., and the question of imperialism had to be dodged. This will explain why the republican platform of 1904 did not reiterate the republican platform plank of 1856 which referred to "those twin relics of barbarism, polygamy and slavery."

The Colorado opponents of union labor are so thoroughly convinced of the injustice of the boycott that they are earnestly boycotting all who do not assist them in showing the injustice of the boycott. This may be rather devious and obscure, but it is not nearly so devious as the ways of the union wreckers.

Justice the First Essential.

Just now there is considerable discussion of civic conditions, civic improvements and civic righteousness. Newspapers are publishing civic sermons and the duty of the individual to society is being emphasized. These discussions cover the observance of law and order, cleanliness in the management of a city, virtue and beauty as factors in national, civic and individual life and the best means of bringing them about. The subject is a broad one and it is impossible to deal with it briefly. There is one principle, however, which is fundamental and without which there can be no civic improvement and, in fact, no substantial civic ties. That principle is justice. The government, if it would be secure, must rest upon justice and the dealings between man and man must be characterized by justice. No stable society can be built upon any other foundation. Intelligence ought to be the handmaiden of justice, but it cannot take the place of justice. A society composed of intellectual athletes would not hold together for a day without the cohesive power of justice. In fact, without justice as a